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INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 000629

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SRAP, SCA/FO, SCA/A, EUR/RPM
STATE PASS USAID FOR ASIA/SCAA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/17/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: ISOLATION OF SEBARI BEGINS

Classified By: PRT and Sub-National Governance Director Valerie C. Fowler for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) The Sebari District in north-central Khost remains one of the most insecure in the province, and a February security shura in Sebari highlighted the challenges the Government of Afghanistan (GIROA) faces in establishing a relationship with local elders to stem the violence. Despite repeated promises from elders and other leaders in the district to provide information to assist the Government in stemming the violence, 33 Afghan National Police (ANP) and 10 Afghan National Army (ANA) were killed in the past year, and the district was the scene of the most IED attacks of any district in the country. In an effort to put pressure on the Sebari elders to be more responsive, the PRT, maneuver battalion, and TF Currahee have agreed to implement a policy of isolation. Under this policy, development and governance projects will be denied to Sebari, even as they continue to be implemented in districts surrounding it. The goal will be to highlight the development benefits that flow from support to the Afghan government's security efforts. Under the new policy, which was developed in consultation with Governor Qalandarzai, security will continue to be provided in Sebari.

ELDERS PROTEST SECURITY OPERATIONS

12. (SBU) The February security shura in Sebari, attended by tribal elders, representatives of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), Coalition Forces (CF), and the GIROA, was one of the first high-profile appearances by Governor Hamidullah Qalandarzai. He delivered a strong message urging support for the GIROA's efforts to end insecurity. Tribal elders agreed on the need for development in Sebari, but made no new promises to report on insurgent activity or to resist insurgent presence in the district. Instead, the elders enumerated grievances, including: the seizure of AK-47s by ANSF or CF, noting that Afghan law permits each Afghan to possess an AK-47 in his home for safety; night operations, including house and madrassa searches; detentions; the killing of civilians by CF; and stolen property, primarily jewelry, during searches.

13. (SBU) The District Administrator, Gul Qasim, sporting his customary bandolier, took a position between the other GIROA representatives and the elders, echoing concerns about weapons seizures and emphasizing that security forces should respect Afghan culture. He argued that the people of Sebari could not be "put on the right way by force." He said we need to proceed slowly, listen to their problems, and solve them jointly. Qasim criticized the poor communication by GIROA, noting that he only learned of the shura the night before and that he is not informed when ANSF and CF conduct operations in his district. Qasim concluded by reiterating that the hearts of the people of Sebari could not be won by

force and quoted a Pashto saying "if an Afghan takes his revenge after 100 years, it is not too late for him," a remark that was greeted with loud applause.

ELDERS CHALLENGED TO ASSIST GIROA IN SECURITY

¶4. (SBU) Afghan National Police (ANP) and Afghan National Army (ANA) speakers emphasized Sebari,s place as the most insecure district in the province, where 33 ANP and 10 ANA had been killed along the road leading to Sebari (via IEDs and attacks on checkpoints) in the past year. ANA and ANP both stressed that the enemy could not be present in Sebari without local support. ANA General Israr criticized enemy propaganda broadcasts from mosques forbidding appropriate Islamic burial rites and prayers for fallen ANSF. He noted that the people of Sebari had made a lot of requests from the government, and in return, the government had requested their help in securing the district - to no avail.

¶5. (C) The maneuver commander stressed that CF are in Afghanistan to help make it stable and secure, but the Sebari people have broken previous promises to contribute to security. As evidence, he cited a recent case in which Sebari elders requested the release of a detainee (an IED facilitator caught attacking the Yaqubi sub-station in Sebari), signed an agreement pledging there would be no more IEDs if the detainee were released, and then did nothing when 21 IEDs and 17 events of indirect fire took place following his release. The commander pledged to work with the madrassa union to address any problems, to continue to respect Afghan culture, and to cease night operations if security is

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established in Sebari.

GOVERNOR URGES AFGHAN SUPPORT FOR AFGHANISTAN

¶6. (C) Governor Qalandarzai interspersed references to Islam and Afghan culture throughout his remarks, and showed respect for the assembled elders by reminding them of their familiarity with traditional forms of Afghan decision-making (shuras and jirgas) that allow people to work out joint solutions. The governor described himself as an Afghan, a mujahid, and a Muslim who works with the GIROA and encouraged the people of Sebari to do the same. The governor chided the elders for failing to report suspicious activities and people either to the district administrator or to him. He noted that security operations occur for a reason and, absent security, development could not take place in Sebari. Reminding those assembled that they are the key to security, he pledged that "if you can promise me there will be no IEDs here, we will stop all the missions. I promise you that." As the governor closed with a prayer for a secure Afghanistan, a rocket detonated nearby, providing a suitably ironic ending to the security shura.

Comment

¶7. (C) The decision of the TF Currahee commander to isolate Sebari from development but not security (both ANSF and CF will remain) was not taken lightly and was made in consultation with Governor Qalandarzai. Persistent security problems have resulted in a virtual standstill in development for months anyway. The new CF and GIROA policy will seek to focus attention on development in the districts surrounding Sebari and highlight the benefits that ensue from improvements in security. In the days since the shura, significant security incidents continued, including two IEDs, the murder of a local national accused of being an informant, a booby-trap device, and six incidents of gunfire. It remains to be seen how effective the new policy will be and what next steps will be taken should the policy fail to elicit significant change.

18. (U) This report has been reviewed by the Khost PRT Commander, TF Glory, LTC David Ell, and TF Currahee Regional Advisor Kelly Degnan.
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